

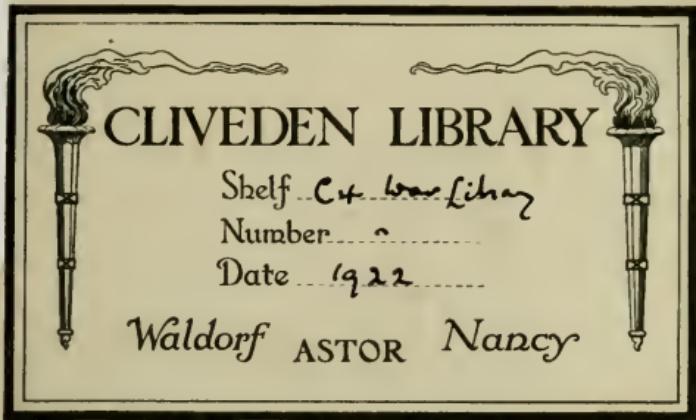
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# THOUGHTS IN WAR-TIME.

FOUR SERMONS  
BY THE  
REVEREND R. E. ROBERTS, M.A.,  
*Vicar of S. Mark's, Peterborough.*

*PRICE SIXPENCE.*

NOTE.—The Churchwardens of S. Mark's have kindly made themselves responsible for the cost of producing this little book, with the result that all the money derived from its sale will be given to the local funds of the British Red Cross Society.

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# DEDICATION.

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MY DEAR PARISHIONERS AND FRIENDS,

It is just ten years since I was licensed and solemnly admitted to a Curacy in this Parish. I take leave to mark the occasion by dedicating to you, and particularly to the congregations habitually worshipping in S. Mark's and S. Barnabas' Churches, these "Thoughts in War-time." They have the advantage of being fairly representative of what I have endeavoured to teach, and the disadvantage of my method of doing so, in the hundreds of sermons you have heard from me.

I ask you to accept the little book as an expression of my gratitude for all the kindness and support you have extended to me, and of my happiness in ministering amongst you.

That the spirit of Christ our Saviour may be more and more manifested among us is the earnest and prayerful wish of your faithful servant and affectionate friend,

R. E. ROBERTS.

*June, 1917.*

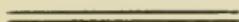
*POSTSCRIPT.*

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*Shortly before this little book emerged from the hands of the Publishers I was offered by the Bishop and accepted the Benefice of Knighton, Leicester.*

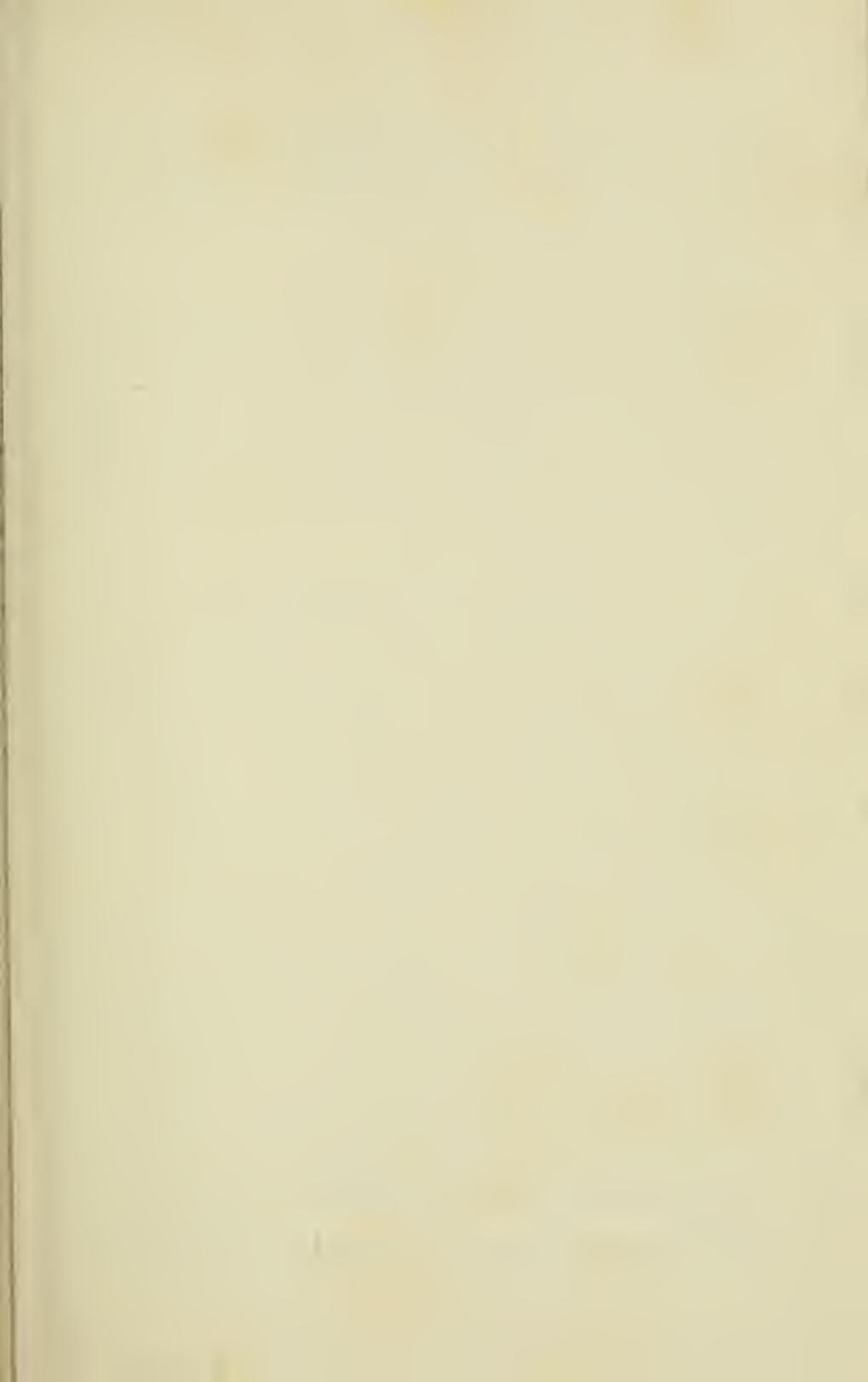
*I shall cherish many happy memories of S. Mark's Parish, and pray God's Blessing may rest upon the Church there. R. E. R.*

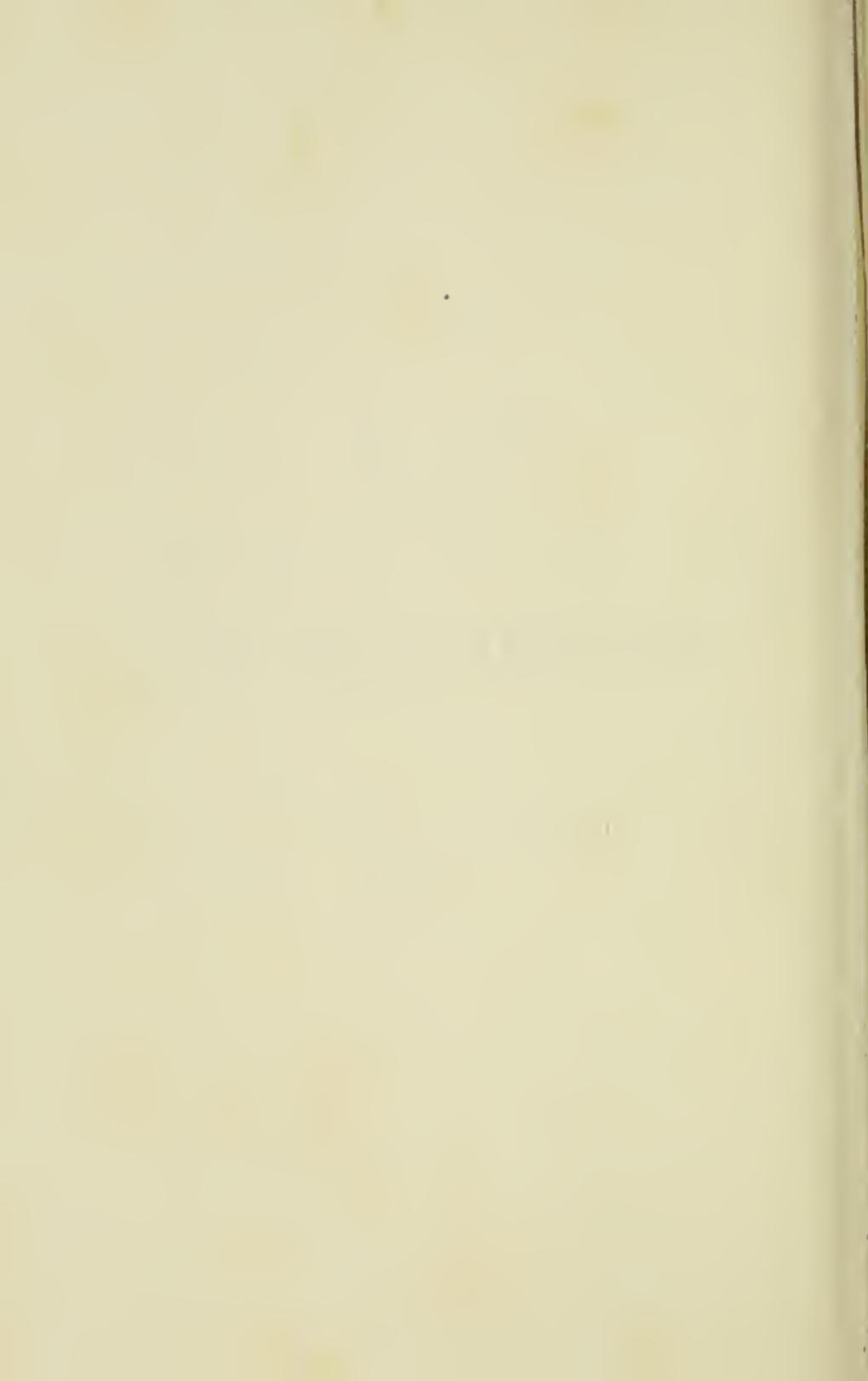
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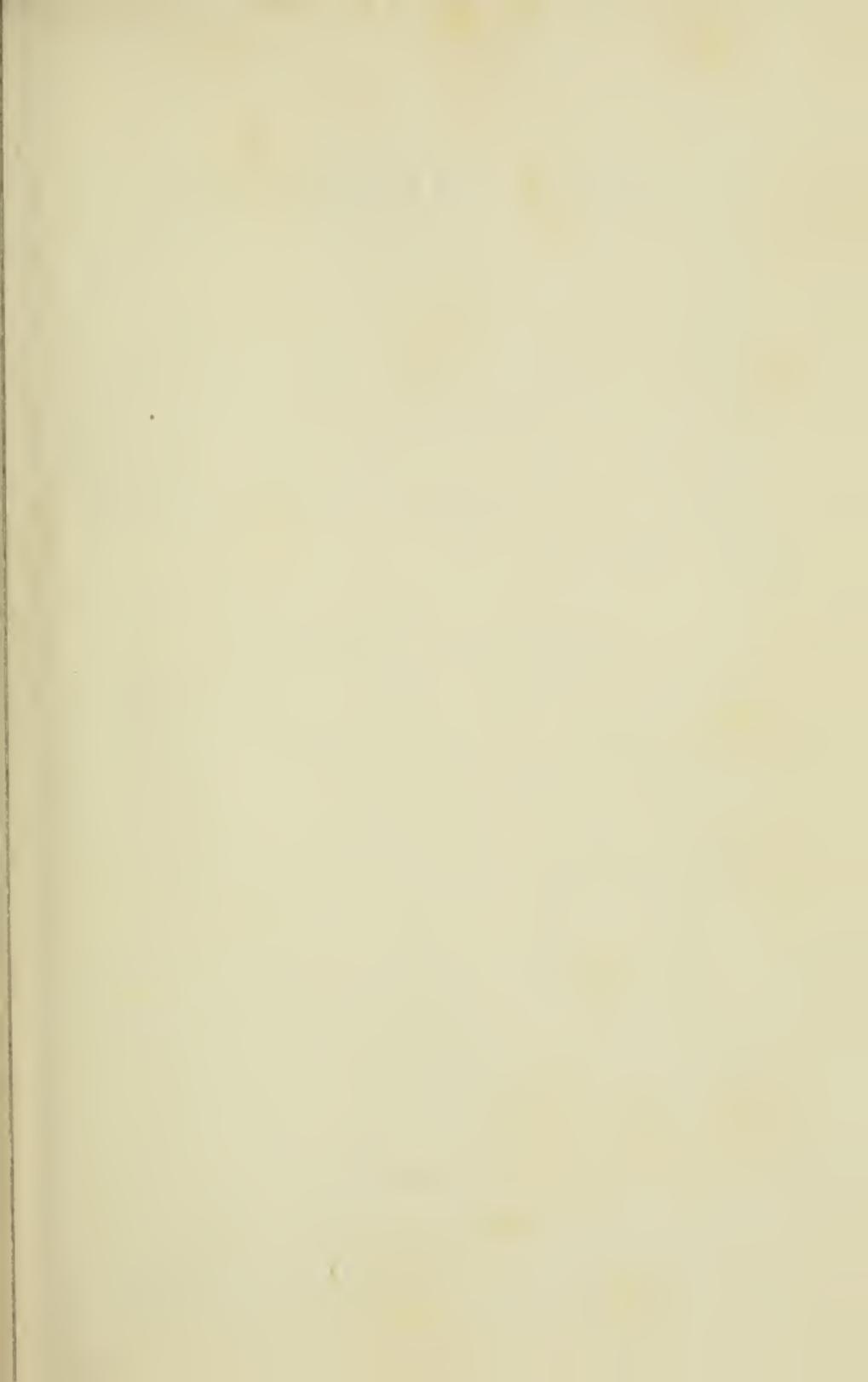


# PROVIDENCE.









# PROVIDENCE.

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The Lord is King, the earth may be glad thereof :  
yea, the multitude of the isles may be glad thereof.  
Clouds and darkness are round about him : right-  
eousness and judgment are the habitation of his  
seat.—Psalm xcvi., 1, 2.

## **The fact of Providence.**

The Lord is King. There is a ring of confidence in the statement. These old Psalmists did believe intensely in Providence. To them God was a present reality, a living intelligent Person who actually reigned in the kingdom of men.

The same belief is very general to-day. We find it even beyond the confines of church and chapel. People with little idea of what we understand as orthodox convictions believe not only that there is a God, but that He controls and directs the course of events. One of the things which impressed me most in the Army was the intensity of this belief

among almost all officers and men. Many whose knowledge of Christian Doctrine was sadly deficient believed most fervently in the Providence of God. An officer who was excessively anxious to disclaim any pretension to be religious, and who certainly was ‘a man of the world,’ said to me, “I am quite convinced those Angels did appear at Mons. I was there, and although I did not see them, I saw the enemy’s horses take alarm and refuse to advance when according to all human calculations they ought to have trampled us to the dust.” And then he added, “We shall win this war because God will not allow the Right to be defeated.” That sort of simple faith is typical ; one meets it almost everywhere, among civilians as well as soldiers. It is the most universal of all religious convictions, and whatever its limitations it has the effect of inspiring prayer and sustaining confidence—the two things which perhaps we most need in this fierce and prolonged ordeal.

But in order to have a right conception of Divine government, it is important to recognise that it is

both *general* and *particular*. God has the whole universe to consider and control, and, being what He is, He seeks and works for the goodness and happiness of nations, continents, and worlds. It is important to bear this in mind, because it goes far to protect us on the one hand against exaggerated expectations of Providential intervention in the interest of undertakings which concern us more especially as individuals, and on the other hand against misjudging the actions of Providence. The whole is greater than its part ; and the fact that God governs and cares for the whole must necessarily act as a restraining influence upon our notion of His dealings with the parts. And yet, His Government is also *particular*, i.e., it has regard for the component parts which make up the whole. Our blessed Lord's teaching is unmistakable on this point. "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God. But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered." The goodness and happiness of mankind generally are not sought without regard for the goodness and

happiness of individuals. Just as in the Army, a commanding officer who cares for the success of the whole movement displays concern for the due protection of every man engaged in it, so God whilst ruling the universe does not lose sight of the several parts and entities of which it consists. Divine Government is not Prussian ; it is Divine.

Now this Government is usually administered through laws, which, because they are very common, we call Natural laws. But remember we are not governed by laws ; we are governed through laws by God. God is not a machine. He is not irrevocably committed to a routine. Again and again, in the Old and New Testaments, we are assured that behind the laws of Nature is the Sovereignty of God. If, therefore, to us individually, there seems adequate reason for the suspension of a Natural law, we are perfectly justified in appealing to His loving kindness and supreme intelligence. We must, of course, be sure that our motive, so far from being frivolous or merely selfish, is pure and good. But granted our prayer is offered in the right spirit,

the whole teaching of the Bible, and above all of our Blessed Lord Himself, is such as to encourage it. Let no one in this time of gigantic movements and appalling happenings think that Prayer on behalf of even a single individual is unauthorised or useless. Above the raging of battles and the crushing of nations is God, supreme, intelligent and gracious—gracious enough to hear the cry of His humblest subject if only it be sincere, and even to supersede a Natural law where in His wisdom He knows such intervention will better serve the great purpose of life. The Lord is King.

### **Our Knowledge limited.**

It is true, however, that God's answers to our prayers are sometimes very different from what we hope and expect ; true also that a great deal which takes place in the world is, at any rate at first sight, unintelligible to us. "Clouds and darkness are round about Him." Just now perhaps more than ever we are baffled by what is happening ; the world seems all out of gear and control, and if there be a devil

he appears to be having it all his own way. People are puzzled and perplexed. Again and again I have been asked these last months, "Why all this slaughter? If God be good and supreme why was my husband—as good a man as ever lived—why was he killed?"

It will alter what would be an accusatory judgment in such a case if we frankly confess that God's government is on such an enormous scale as to be beyond our intellectual grasp. God guides the destinies of the whole universe, and the blow that falls on that bewildered mother, or the swift tragedy one sees in a trench, must be considered, and, if you will, judged in relation to the whole universe. Therefore from the human point of view clouds and darkness are round about Him. And then our vision is often so short that at a given moment we fail to appreciate the full significance of a particular event. There are many instances of this. Imagine the perplexity of Jacob when Joseph, his favourite son, a handsome and capable young man, was represented as slain. Or again in

the New Testament : What must the disciples have felt when Jesus upon Whom they had staked their all lay helpless on the Cross, and the cry went up from parched and quivering lips, " My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" The experience of the early Christians was much the same. When it seemed so important they should make a good start they were subject to violent persecution and hounded from place to place, cast into prisons and slaughtered with impunity. So it is in this War-time. Every day things are happening which within our very limited view cannot be otherwise than disappointing, dark and terrible. " Clouds and darkness are round about Him."

It is because of this limitation of vision and comprehension that we ought never to judge, especially in the case of individuals in respect of misfortunes they experience. You remember how perfectly explicit our Lord was on this point : " His disciples asked Him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned nor

his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." The same warning is given in reference to the Galileans whom Pilate had murdered : " Suppose ye," cried Jesus, " that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans because they suffered such things? I tell you Nay. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and slew them, Think ye that they were sinners above all that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you Nay." Neither you nor I have any shadow of right to attribute the suffering and affliction of anyone to Providential punishment. We do not know all the ways of Providence ; our knowledge and vision are circumscribed. " Clouds and darkness are round about Him."

### **The Justice of Providence.**

But the clouds and darkness are not altogether impenetrable. We have, it is true, our limitations, but we are not abandoned to blind and sheer stupidity. The Psalmist, whilst admitting certain difficulties, cuts a way through the clouds and is

satisfied that the God behind them is perfectly just: Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His seat and the very foundation of His Throne. The Psalmist believed it. Do you? Does the evidence available convince you that in spite of all which tends to show the contrary, God is good and just? Let us glance again at those instances of darkness. The selling of Joseph to the Ishmaelites culminated in his elevation to preside over the productive resources of Egypt. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was immediately followed by the Resurrection and the complete attainment of Redemption for mankind. The persecution of the early Christians had the unexpected effect of dispersing abroad the Gospel of Christian Salvation. And is there not evidence in every age that God over-rules the machinations of Satan for the promotion of those higher qualities with which we associate His Sacred Name, and of which indeed He is the only Source? There is perhaps in all history no greater revelation of the power of the Devil than this war. And yet even in the midst of this appalling

holocaust it is apparent that God inspires noble elements of character, and gathers a richer harvest than generations of peace had yielded. I submit to you that, wherever we are able to take anything approaching a full view of the case, the balance is on the right side and bears out the saying of the Psalmist. Let me beg you, my brethren, not lightly to lose or forsake this belief in the Righteousness of Providence. To lose this is to lose all. Belief in the goodness of God is the first and most essential thing in our Religion. That is why our blessed Lord in the great model Prayer made "Hallowed be Thy Name" the first petition. Our Father, Who art in Heaven, enable us before all else to think of Thee as perfectly Holy, and always to know Thee as good and righteous and just.

### The Joy of Belief in Providence.

The Lord is King, and though clouds and darkness are round about Him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His seat. Therefore the earth may be glad thereof, yea the multitude of

the isles may be glad thereof. The joy of belief in Providence ! If your faith is well established that the world so far from being a mere whirlpool of chance and confusion is governed by a supremely wise and good God, you will have peace of mind and inward happiness. Briefly, this faith will have three effects upon you. First, you will wish to pray : to come into communion with God, and in that communion to commit all your cares and anxieties to Him Who cares for you. Secondly, you will as a result of prayer be patient and brave. Things may appear to go all wrong, but you know that on the Throne and sitting above the water-floods is God. He holds in His hands the reins that control the universe ; He guides the destinies of men and nations. Believing him to be infallible and All-Sovereign, you will be content to bide your time and patiently endure till the shadows flee and light prevails where now is darkness. And lastly, think what happiness such faith will bring you. When depression has seized the doubter and despair the unbeliever, you will go on your journey

with the music of optimism in your soul.

Grow old along with me !  
 The best is yet to be,  
 The last of life, for which the first was made :  
 Our times are in His Hand  
 Who saith, "A whole I planned,  
 Youth shows but half ; trust God ; see all ;  
 nor be afraid ! "

Should not the heart beat once . . . . .  
 "Praise be Thine ! "

"I see the whole design,  
 I, who saw power, see now love perfect too :  
 Perfect I call Thy plan :  
 Thanks that I was a man !  
 Maker, remake, complete,—I trust what  
 Thou shalt do." \*

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\* Robert Browning in "Rabbi Ben Ezra."

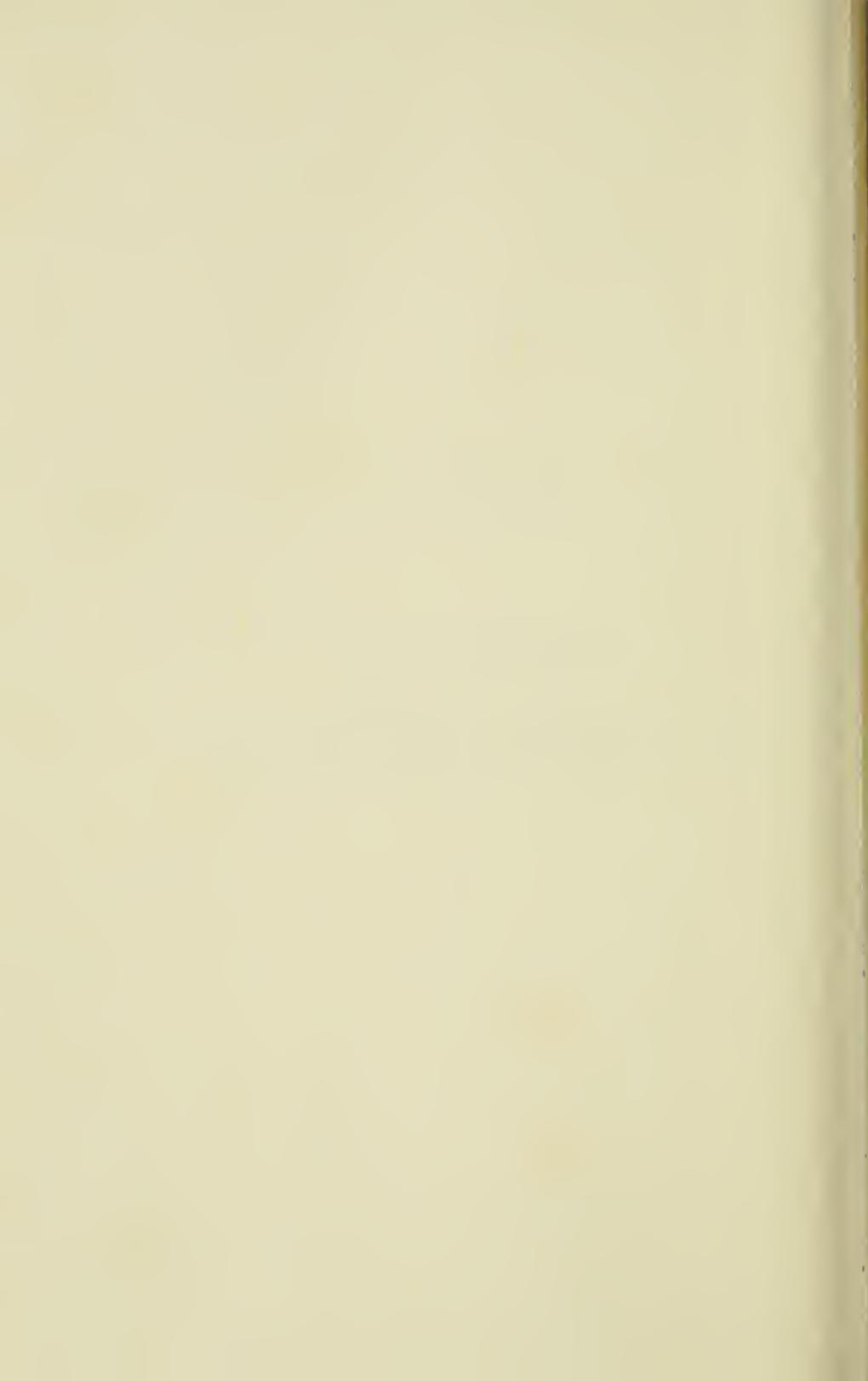


II.

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# LIFE'S FULFILMENT.



# LIFE'S FULFILMENT.

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Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more.—S. Luke xviii., 29, 30.

The circumstances which led up to this great declaration are interesting to recall and significant in their bearing. Our Blessed Lord had addressed certain words to a young man desirous of ensuring for himself eternal safety, and these had a very depressing and indeed alarming effect upon the Apostles who overheard them. They exclaimed in amazement, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter the Kingdom of God !” And they

asked in perplexity, "Who then can be saved?" The moment seemed opportune to have the whole situation clarified, and to come to an understanding with Jesus. The condition of their services to and with Him ought to be defined, at any rate in general terms. They had taken great risks. Although, with one or two exceptions, they were not men of wealth, their sacrifice had been very considerable, for they had turned their backs on homes and domestic ties that were dear to them ; they had abandoned a means of livelihood, in which, by training and long practice, they were experts, and had involved themselves in an enterprise which was anything but popular. It was not surprising nor unnatural that they should require to have some notion of their prospects. In such circumstances they invariably looked to S. Peter to express and interpret their thoughts. He was their spokesman, and he now filled the rôle with characteristic directness and courage. "Lo," he exclaimed, "we left our own, and followed Thee." It is a challenge. Has the Master anything to

offer? If men make sacrifice for Him and all that He represents, what is to be their ultimate fate? Are they mere temporary tools to be cast aside when spent and effete? Is the sacrifice made and service rendered the end of all? If it is frail humanity that prompts such wistful questionings, then, indeed, are many of us human. We like to have some idea of our destiny. Is there reward? Shall we have the gratifying consciousness that all is not vain? Shall we have some share in the triumph of the cause we have championed? Will there be opportunities for the continued exercise of our best and most cherished capacities?

Now, mark our Lord's attitude. He did not rebuke the bold questioner, nor refuse to answer. And the answer He gave was full and generous. "Verily I say unto you, 'There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more.'" We see, then, that Christ promised abundant reward to the dutiful

and loyal. Every sacrifice will have ample recompense,—a recompense that far out-weighs in value anything one has lost in the meantime. We are encouraged to be enterprising, to take risks, to stake all, in the fulfilment of our Christian vocation.

### A Manly Religion.

It appears, then, that Christianity is a manly Religion which awakens in us the best ambitions, and incites us to accomplish and achieve.

God who created me  
Nimble and light of limb,  
In three elements free,  
To run, to ride, to swim :  
Not when the sense is dim,  
But now from the heart of joy,  
I would remember Him :  
Take the thanks of a boy.

Jesu, King and Lord,  
Whose are my foes to fight,  
Gird me with Thy sword  
Swift and sharp and bright.  
Thee would I serve if I might ;  
And conquer if I can,  
From day-dawn till night,  
Take the strength of a man.\*

But this is an aspect which has been far too much neglected. Although it is not the only aspect, it is of the first importance, and holds an essential place in the moral structure of our Religion. We ministers especially, and you laymen too in measure, are to blame for not having presented a better balanced interpretation of the teaching of Jesus Christ. We have not dwelt sufficiently either on His exacting claims, or on His sure rewards,—the latter, because we fear the former. The crown is in the background because it presupposes the cross. We have erred, I think,

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\* H. C. Beeching, in the Oxford Book of English Verse.

on the side of not committing our Faith to very much. There has been a manifest tendency towards smoothness, and an exaggerated regard for people's convenience and susceptibilities. With what result? One cannot but observe that in the minds of many men Christianity is chiefly associated with an effeminate inoffensiveness. Mercifully, however, in spite of our mistake in not advocating sufficiently a manly enterprise, men generally have retained a robust ambition. It is, doubtless, instinctive. You all must have observed that, when a clear call and soul-stirring appeal is made in the interest of a great and righteous purpose, people are willing and even anxious to respond. If ever we had any doubt about this, our experience in the War has surely dispelled it. A young man of wealth, beloved beyond measure of all his neighbours, and apparently destined to a life of boundless pleasure, remarked to me, "I am glad this War has given me the opportunity to show that I am capable of something better than soft-living." He has since made the supreme sacrifice.

Think of the hardships and agonies millions of our fellow-countrymen have patiently endured these three years! We know now what splendid qualities are latent in men. The pity of it is, that in consequence of a certain timidity on our part in normal times, and a certain aloofness on their own part, many of them are wholly unconscious that such a demonstration of self-surrender is just what Christianity teaches and inspires. They do not know that in facing desolation and death in order to stem the rising tide of a monstrous tyranny, they are more Christian than the most punctilious priest or the most 'pious' Protestant who is self-regardful and finds excuses for taking no risk; they do not know that in their splendid patriotism and self-sacrifice they stand on Holy Ground, and, like Simon of Cyrene of old, share with Christ the burden of the Cross on the very slopes of Calvary.

## Virtue Rewarded.

And the second great fact which our Lord's attitude and utterance bring home to us is, that such nobility of conduct does not go unrewarded. The men who have so borne themselves, though they are "still in death," and their bodies are exposed to sun and storm in 'no-man's land,' are not abandoned of Heaven. They know the thrill of duty done in extremest peril ; in their soul is the joy of achievement ; in their ears the sweet sound of the Master's commendation, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." Although their life on earth was brief, it was wondrously intense ; and it is likely that in a few fleeting hours they knew more of life's fulfilment than many who have run the course of three score years and ten.

It is not growing like a tree  
In bulk, doth make man better be ;  
Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,  
To fall a log at last, dry, bald, and sere :

A lily of a day  
Is fairer far in May,

Although it fall and die that night ;  
It was the plant and flower of light.  
In small proportions we just beauties see ;  
And in short measures, life may perfect be.\*

After all, brethren, the intensity, gallantry, and inner joy of such a life are a higher and more enduring reward than all the prizes and possessions of this material world. “There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God’s sake, who shall not receive manifold more.”

### **Christianity Aggressive.**

Let us try and regain this manly aspect of Christianity ; let us re-assure the men and women who spend themselves by labour and suffering and sacrifice for some good end, that they are doing the most Christian thing in the world ; and let us

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\* Ben Jonson.

have the courage to tell those who shrink from such conduct, and whose chief concern is their own safety and comfort, that though they be ever so ‘worthy,’ from the Christian standpoint they are deplorably defective. It seems to me that one of our greatest needs is to raise again the standard of an attacking Christ : to interpret Him to the world as God’s great Joshua, Captain of mighty hosts, Who leads His followers in strong and irresistible attack upon all that is base and evil in life : Who marches on to achievement and victory, and a thousandfold repays and blesses those that have rallied round Him, and in His spirit borne the brunt of battle. “The Son of God goes forth to war ;” and the challenge comes to you and me and all mankind, “Who follows in His train ?” That is a presentment of Christ which is at once true and effective. Strong leadership seldom fails to attract. Let me give an illustration from the history of Wales. When Owen Glyndwr made a stand for national independence the whole country was kindled with

enthusiasm. It must have been known from the start that the enemy's resources were very much greater than their own, and that the prospect of victory was extremely slender ; and yet, when the Flag with its fierce red dragon was unfurled, the whole race of the Cymry flocked to lift it on high, and to carry it onward and forward, whatever obstruction they encountered. Farmers sold their cattle to buy horses and war equipment ; labourers hurried from England, and mercenaries from France and the distant East. The Bards sang songs that flamed with patriotism ; students and clergy broke through their scruples and hastened to follow the National Hero ; high and low counted it not loss but gain to fall in his service. For fourteen years of bitter and dogged fighting he was sustained by devoted adherents, until at last he died, still defiant. So it ever has been ; so it will be.

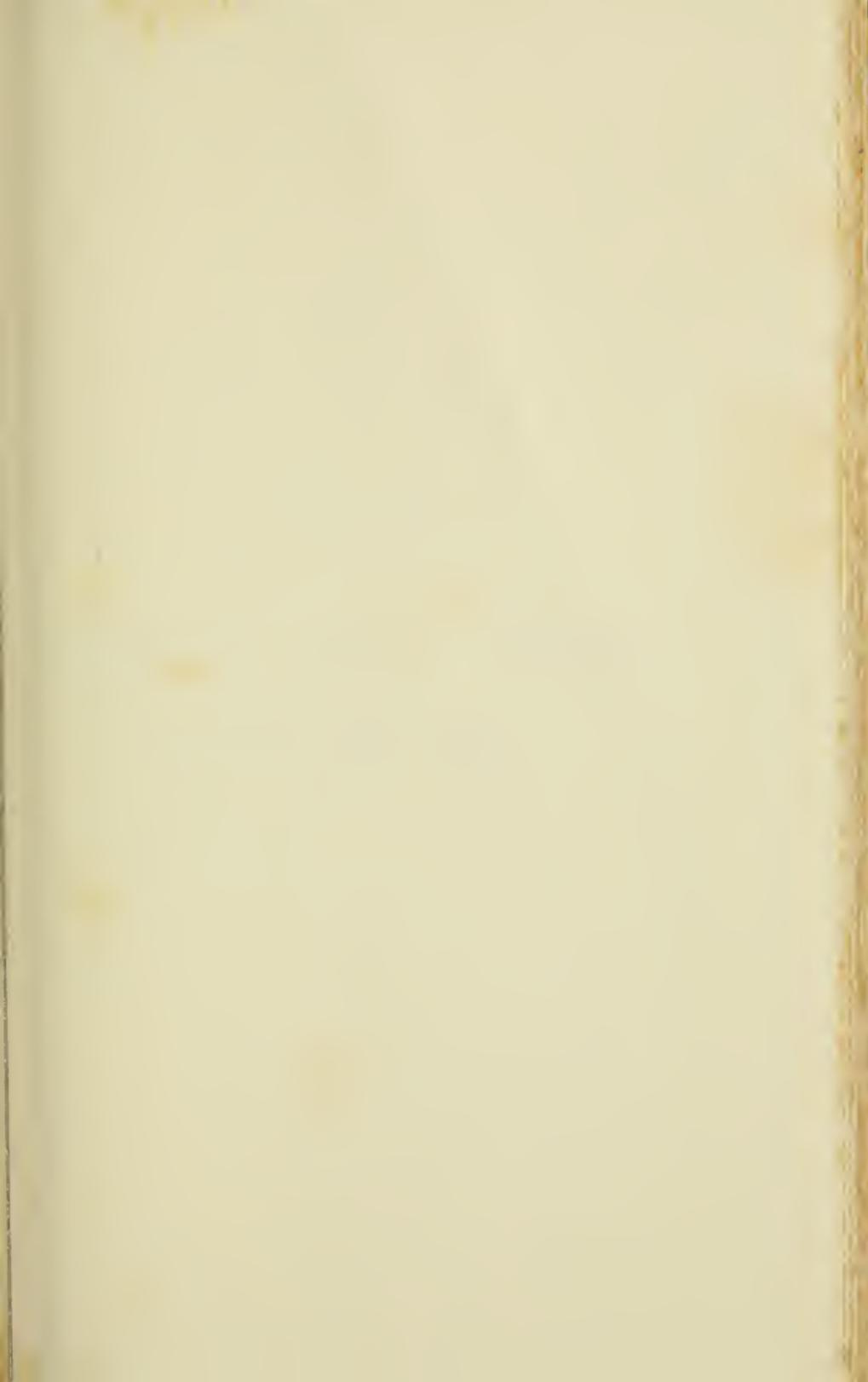
If we proclaim Jesus Christ as the great Leader of men,—the Commander, Who with supreme authority calls for service and sacrifice, and

abundantly blesses His followers,—we shall attract to Christianity the great masses of men, and we shall see our churches full of ungrudging and loyal disciples.

God grant it may be so more and more in time to come.

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III.

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# LOVE IN THE CHURCH.

# LOVE IN THE CHURCH.

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A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another ; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.—  
S. John xiii., 34, 35.

The words gather solemnity from the circumstances surrounding their first utterance. Our Lord and His disciples were in the ‘upper room’ in Jerusalem, where they had duly observed the Feast of the Passover. The Cross was already throwing its shadow in advance, and the Last Supper had been instituted as one of the two great Sacraments of the Christian Dispensation ; Judas restless yet resolute in his dark undertaking had relieved the little company of his presence ; and Jesus as a symbol and example of humility had deigned to wash the feet of His disciples. Then it was He

raised Himself, and looking round upon the nucleus of His Church, delivered them the solemn charge to love one another. Surely, if anything were required to give the words additional force and to make them burn into the hearts of those who heard them, we have it here. It was, observe, a 'new' commandment. In the Greek there are two words translated 'new,' one suggesting a forward outlook,—*young* as compared with aged; the other suggesting retrospection and indicating *fresh* as compared with worn-out. It is the latter word that is found here. And when we take the hint, and send our thoughts far back into Jewish history, we see its deep and subtle significance. In one sense the commandment was anything but new, for had not Moses enjoined, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself?" But it was now endowed by the Great Messiah, Incarnate Son of God, with a significance it never had before, and with a certain freshness which gave it incomparable force. He gave a new motive for obeying it, namely, God's love for men. This had the effect of carrying the principle of

mutual love very much farther than had been imagined under the old Dispensation, and of inspiring it with undreamt-of graces. If you would appreciate this striking development you can hardly do better than compare the thirteenth chapter of S. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians with the measured benevolence of the Pentateuch.

"Even as I have loved you." Our Lord's intention, as already indicated, was not so much to point to Himself as an example, but rather to supply His disciples with a new incentive to love one another. The argument appears to be : 'Because God in Christ has loved you with a love that is infinite, the least you can do is to love one another.' It has been well said that love is the meeting-place of God and man ; but this does not mean that man initiates love or any other virtue. "We love because He first loved us." It is all of God. This is well illustrated in Browning's *Saul*, in which David, whilst soothing the king with voice and harp, and yielding himself to the spell of inspiration, saw the prophetic vision of Divine Love revealed in its

fulness in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

'Tis Thou God that givest, 'tis I who receive.  
In the first is the last, in Thy will is my power  
to believe.

All's one gift.

. . . . .

Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst  
Thou,—so wilt Thou!

So shall crown Thee, the topmost, ineffablest,  
uttermost crown—

And Thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave  
up nor down

One spot for the creature to stand in!

The disciples were bidden to imbibe the very love God had revealed in the Incarnation and Sacrifice of His Son, and to diffuse it as the symbol and seal of His presence and spirit among them. The church, of which the nucleus was gathered in that upper room, was to be characterised by the love our Blessed Lord had so superbly demonstrated under provocations and hardships it is impossible to measure; “even as I have loved you.”

### **The Primitive Church.**

And it was so characterised in its early days. In whatever respect we may have advanced from the

standard of the primitive Christians, we must admit with shame that in respect of the great principle and paramount duty of love, the Church has deteriorated. At any rate it seems to me that this supremely important subject has not the place it once had in the teaching and practice and general regard of Church people. We owe to S. Jerome the touching story of how S. John in his old age, when too infirm either to walk to church or to speak at any length after having been conveyed there, used to say repeatedly, "Little children, love one another." When asked why he so often gave the same counsel, he answered, "Because it is the Lord's commandment, and if it only be fulfilled, it is enough." But the duty thus pressed home by earnest exhortation was most effectively emphasised by the practice of the Agape,—a social gathering of the local church, arising no doubt from the custom of common meals which obtained alike among the heathen and early Christians. At this love-feast all distinction of class and wealth was subordinate to the spirit of mutual love and fraternity ; and the whole affair was

solemnised and uplifted by the celebration of the Holy Eucharist which immediately followed.\* Justin records of this practice,—“Those of us who are wealthy help all that are in want, and we always remain together.” In the primitive Church the close connection of the ‘new commandment’ with the sacrament of the Last Supper was a conspicuous feature. I cannot but feel, brethren, that in this respect at any rate, the Holy Communion has lost something of its significance, and that for us it is not so much a token of brotherhood as it was in the first four centuries.† And observe that not only was love extolled by preachers and accepted and practised in the Church, but it was reckoned by friend and foe alike to be the most distinguishing feature of the early Christians. Tertullian exclaimed, “The working of such love puts a brand upon us, for see, say the heathen, how they love one another.”

\* I owe these references to Gwatkin’s “Selections from early Christian Writers,” a very useful book for those who, like myself, have little time and less aptitude for original research.

† See “Reservation Addresses” by the Bishops of Oxford and Chelmsford (Robert Scott), in which Dr. Gore reviews and deplores the process by which the Holy Communion has become an intensely individual act instead of what it was in the beginning—a corporate one.

And even hostile Lucian remarked, "Their Master makes them believe that they are all brothers" Quotations such as these which abound in the literature, Christian and pagan alike, of the first few centuries of the Christian era leave one in no doubt that brotherly love was prominent among the marks of the primitive Church ; and in view of our Lord's teaching in the text and elsewhere we cannot question it was intended to be so.

### The Church of To-day.

Brethren, is the same in any appreciable degree true of the Church to-day ? I ask you, as members of the Church of Christ, to face the question seriously and with as little prejudice as possible. We have, at any rate, arrived at this,—that in a world which to no small extent is governed by business considerations, and is apt to show more concern for economics than for morals, (although in the long run the two must surely be in harmony),—in such a world I say, the Church was intended to be the home and treasure-house of love, a haven from the

selfish conflicts of life, a witness to those higher aspirations and finer feelings which alone can satisfy the souls of men. But is it? What of our Church of England? We take a pride in its comprehensive character, and rejoice to think that our aim is not rigid uniformity, but accommodation for reasonable diversity; and we do well, for surely it is not the purpose of love to obliterate natural differences. Reproach is brought not by variety, but by the bitterness of feelings, the narrow one-sided outlook, the hardness of disposition, the scandalous separations, from which, alas! few churches seem free. If only we had learnt the great lesson of love, and taken to heart the importance ascribed to it by our Blessed Lord, our diversities, however numerous, would be sanctified, and our differences, however deep, would be mellowed, for "love suffereth long and is kind." Do not misunderstand me. I am far from suggesting we should, out of consideration for those who differ from us, abandon convictions and cultivate only a faith which is flabby. No. What I plead

for is a loving disposition towards all men. This does not involve anything so indiscriminating and unnatural as that we should be equally fond of everyone; but it does mean a respect for the sincere convictions of others, and a genuine wish for their well-being and happiness. This practical adoption of love would bring about the atmosphere in which the principle would increase its hold, and unity would be more and more realised. Some improvement, I believe, has been brought about in this respect within the last generation, and especially within these fateful three years. Men have more respect for other folk's convictions than formerly, and instead of adopting towards them an attitude of "fixed bayonets," they are seeking rather their correlation. I thank God, and you too, my friends, that it is my good fortune to serve in a Parish where diversity among the disciples is not lacking, and toleration and unity are conspicuous features.

Now, the secret of this recent and beneficent movement is that, through our various faiths and religious observances, we are really drawing nearer

to our common Master and Saviour. As we advance by divers devotions and enlightened paths towards Him we find that incidentally we are also drawing closer together. It is His will and command that we who bear His Name and claim to be His disciples should live as one family. That is the ideal. And like all other noble ideals it is difficult of realisation. F. D. Maurice said, "If it were only a precept in a book, it would be the cruellest precept ever uttered." But, thank God, it is much more than that. God Himself is love, and has manifested Himself to be so in the life and death of His Son. And by the gift of the Holy Ghost He enables us to respond to that spirit of His Being and to love one another. If we are using aright our means of grace, and coming thereby into real union with God, it seems to me certain and indisputable, that the better Churchmen we are, the more loving in disposition shall we become.

## The Test of Discipleship.

At any rate it is only by such progress we can bear the test our Blessed Lord foretold would be applied to us. "*By this* shall all men know that ye are my disciples." I do not wish to suggest that nothing matters save mutual love. Indeed it is altogether erroneous to regard the Christian virtues like so many isolated atoms. They are all coherent and correlative. Different forms of conduct and varying shades of disposition carry back the mind to questions of belief, and you cannot rightly pronounce judgment upon any one of them if you regard it as altogether independent. There is much inaccurate thinking and more inaccurate talking in consequence of not recognising this fact. Let us try to have a clear conception of what our Lord said in this connexion in our text. He did not say or even suggest that discipleship consists in nothing but good-natured affection. What He did say was, that men would *know* us as His disciples if we had love one to another. Love would be the

quality most sought in Christians, and Christ sanctions the test. What, therefore, we can be quite certain of is, that *domestic affection* among the brethren—the word itself and the whole circumstances surrounding the ‘new commandment’ point rather to this quality than to a general sentiment of inoffensiveness or liberal charity—is an essential feature of Christianity, and that a Church is rightly judged by the spirit which prevails among its members, and not by its external prosperity. No amount of churchmanship and punctilious worship avails where love is wanting. Jehovah’s message to the Jews as recorded in Isaiah i., 14—17, still holds good in principle: “Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth ; they are a trouble to me ; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands I will hide mine eyes from you ; yea, when ye make many prayers I will not hear : your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean : put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes ; cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment,

relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." We know by experience and observation that the world judges us and our Church mainly by our disposition one to another, and our Lord Himself has told us the final judgment will proceed on the same principle.\* We see, then, that whatever else is necessary—and much else *is* necessary—we are no Christians unless we have the loving spirit of Christ in us. You may fuss and fight for certain tenets, but if you have not love all your professions and enthusiasms are like a tinkling cymbal. God grant us to realise this more and more, for, in spite of improvement, the greatest danger which threatens our Church, aye, and our country, is not that involved in those questions which commonly excite most indignation ; it lies rather in those deeper, subtler, less palpable influences, which make us love our party more than the Church, and our Church more than Christianity, and our Christianity more than the Truth, and ourselves more than all. There is the

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\* S. Matthew xxv., 31—46.

real menace. We need in our conduct and judgments that breadth of outlook, that sympathy and wisdom, that self-restraint and brotherly love which so distinguished our Blessed Lord and His early disciples. Pray God to give us this spirit, that the world may know we are indeed true followers of Him whose Name we bear, and that through us men may be drawn to the Christian Religion.

Forgive my rehearsing a personal experience to conclude. We had toiled and stumbled through a wonderful labyrinth of German trenches, when at length we emerged "over the top." A gallant Scots Division had borne the brunt of the first attack, and just here, on the ridge, a very moving spectacle was about us. The ground was littered with hundreds of kilted bodies ; there they laid, gripping their rifles, in a deathly grasp, and their faces to the foe. As I cast my eyes over the ghastly Golgotha, and reflected that it all resulted from Germany's unbridled ambition and hatred, I solemnly swore to myself that, if I were spared to return, I would do all in my poor power to mitigate strife and to

promote peace and goodwill. More than ever that is a cause which imperiously calls for disciples, and in responding we obey the most solemn charge of our Blessed Master : "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another ; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

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IV.

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CHURCHES.

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# THE CHURCHES.

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The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.—Revelation i., 20.

S. John, you remember, was in the Isle of Patmos, where for “the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” he appears to have been banished by Domitian. The loneliness of his life there would naturally conduce to meditation and a certain mysticism, and it was not long before he had yielded all his faculties to the influence of the Holy Spirit and become in the truest sense inspired. “I was in the spirit on the Lord’s Day.”

## The Vision.

His first experience was hearing a great voice as of a trumpet, which said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last: and, what thou seest write in a book, and send it unto the seven

churches which are in Asia." Then he saw seven golden candlesticks, and in the midst "one like unto the Son of Man," and he had in his right hand seven stars. Fortunately for us, and perhaps for S. John too, the voice partially interpreted the mystery : "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches : and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches." What is meant by the *angels* of the seven churches? We generally think of angels as God's messengers going to and fro in obedience to His bidding, or serving as gracious protectors of our persons. But that is not always and exclusively their function. In the eighteenth chapter of S. Matthew's Gospel we have what appears to me another aspect of angels : "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones ; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in Heaven." If their function in this case was to serve as overshadowing Cherubim they would surely have been represented as hovering around their objects of care and devotion, and not

in distant heaven. I suggest, not I trust without humility and reverence, that our Lord was thinking rather of the children's *ideals* ever symbolising before the face of the Father what they might be. Whatever may be advanced against this interpretation, the notion that everyone of us has in heaven a perfect representation of what he or she ought to be and by God's grace might be, is calculated to produce an effect which is at once sobering and inspiring. So here. The angels of the seven churches appear to me to be the ideals of the churches,—a perpetual representation of what God expects Christian Societies to aspire to. We arrive then at this : S. John is bidden to write to the seven churches in Asia, and faithfully portray to them first their actual condition,—the seven candlesticks are the seven churches ; and secondly the ideal towards which they ought ever to be striving,—the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.

### The Churches as they are.

Observe that the candlesticks are of gold. So it may truly be said that the organised bodies of

Christianity have intrinsic value. They have their blemishes and serious defects,—some of which we shall presently notice ; but we do less than justice when, as is sometimes the case, we refuse to acknowledge their worth. When we look broadly upon the world and see the great Churches of the East and West and their million beneficent activities, we cannot doubt that in a general sense they have come into existence by God's will and are sustained by the power of the Holy Ghost. Whatever their faults it is *they* which teach men the knowledge of God and His ways ; *they* which serve to link men's souls in mystical union to the Great Unseen ; *they* which present before the world the ideal example and availing sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Carlyle, with his usual penetration and vehemence, remarked that without the Churches “men were no longer Social but Gregarious, and Society itself a dead carcass,—deserving to be buried.” It is through the ministrations of the Churches that millions find moral principles by which to live and spiritual sustenance for life's journey. To them the Churches

are indeed "as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." The candlesticks, representing the churches, are not without reason wrought of gold.

But a candle as a luminary is not the most effective agent. We may appropriately observe in it at least two defects. First, in a spacious room it lightens but a small portion; the flame is faint and feeble and quite inadequate. And it betokens not untruly the limitations of Christian organisations. Our Blessed Lord's injunctions, and indeed the very nature of our Religion make it indisputable that the Gospel ought to be proclaimed to all peoples. But what are the facts? Are we as concerned about shedding forth to heathen lands the Light of the True God and of His Christ as we are about embellishments and the perfecting of adjuncts in our own respective and local churches? The Foreign Field cries aloud for help and guidance just now. There is a great awakening particularly in China and Japan and India. Dark and dusky races are showing desire and surprising aptitude for

education, and soon they will pass through the tremendous crisis of entering our western civilisation. What sort of influence it will have upon them depends in no little measure on our efforts to give them the guidance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The world has surely had a surfeit of a predominantly scientific culture. The light of Christianity must be so dispersed that these rising nations shall see and walk in the paths of righteousness and peace.

And even here at home the light is feebler than it ought to be, and far from extending to every nook and corner of life. It shines brightly enough it is true in certain little spheres ; but if we are satisfied we make a fatal error, and prove ourselves as incapable of proper judgment as we are destitute of enterprise. Indeed one of our greatest dangers is contentment with restricted groups of more or less pious and virtuous people, and the shelving of the fact that outside the pale of these chosen few there are in most parishes large numbers who never enter a place of worship nor in any way come under the

influence of the Churches.\* This reflection is indeed humbling to all us professing Christians. We have little cause to be sleek and satisfied.

Secondly, the candle's flame is fitful and flickers, and even in its very limited sphere is not steady and stable. In measure this again is true of the Churches. It is obviously their vocation to bear witness to certain truths about God and life, and to uphold those deep and penetrating principles laid down by the Master. But although open hostility and aggressive persecution are no longer the order of the day, the conditions are frequently such as not to facilitate the fulfilment of this supreme duty. Wealth or popularity is occasionally ranged against the advocating and application of Christian principles, and in the face of such opposition Churchmen in the past at any rate have not displayed that tenacious loyalty which God requires of us. We have been all too willing to wink at abuses and condone injustices for fear of giving offence ; and if here and there a prophet has dared to raise his

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\* For a brilliant but not very well balanced statement of this case see "Civilization at the Cross Roads," by J. N. Figgis, p. 33 ff.

voice in protest we have too often dismissed him as "a crank," or held him up to obloquy and scorn.

My brethren, vacillation in the face of principalities and powers is a shame and a scandal to the Churches. As Christians we have certain principles entrusted to us, and if for fear of the loss of popular support or in some selfish interest of whatever sort we keep back or abandon those principles, we bring reproach upon our Religion in the long run, and prove ourselves unworthy of our privilege. Nor is it only moral principles that are entrusted to the Churches, but also certain theological Truths and Doctrines regarding the Person of God and the way of Redemption. It should be our part to tell out these truths with no uncertain note. Whilst guarding against the folly of insistence on what perhaps may be described as the accessories as distinguished from the fundamentals of Religion, we ought to know what we do believe, and should be able to sustain it with intelligence. It is no real Church that hides the essential truths of Christianity in the background, or allows itself to be shifted this way

and that by every new theology that comes along. Stability no less than receptivity is a necessary element in every Church.

These, then, are some respects in which the Churches in varying degrees are defective. The seven candlesticks are the seven churches.

### **The Churches as they might be.**

We pass on to consider the other and higher symbol,—the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches. We have agreed to interpret these words as indicating the ideals of the Churches,—what they ought to be. The stars are above the dust and din of the world, and suggest ideas of loftiness and purity and beauty. They serve also to guide voyagers and travellers by night, and it is significant that the darker it is the more luminous they shine. You may remember how Tennyson in his *Locksley Hall* records impressions of a planet :

Could we dream of wars and carnage, craft and  
madness, lust and spite,

Roaring London, raving Paris, in that point of  
peaceful light ?

Might we not in glancing heavenward on a star  
so silver fair,

Yearn, and clasp our hands and murmur,  
“Would to God that we were there.”

The stars may well symbolise the Churches and the angels the ideals of the Churches. Imagine for a moment what with Heaven's benediction the Churches might be. Think first of their relation to our industries and business transactions. In public and private Ministers of Religion especially ought ever to be holding up before men, without fear or favour, the duty of personal consideration on the one hand and of honest work on the other.\* Justice should be among the foremost of our watchwords, and whilst in our corporate capacity as a Church we must be careful not to dabble in the politics of parties, we ought to be influencing politics by the very nature of our moral convictions. Or again, think what a healing influence the Churches might be in a world so full of suspicion and strife. The Prime Minister recently remarked

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\* There are wise and noble counsels on this subject in Marshall Lang's "The Church and its Social Mission."

in reference to a political problem, which for generations has foiled all efforts at solution, that the basic trouble was not in the nature of the case, but in the suspicious atmosphere which enveloped it. In other words the real ultimate problem was moral, not political ; spiritual, not material. My brief experience of intimate association with employers and workmen in a factory entirely bears out this view. We shall continue to have strikes and strifes and bloodshed,—fundamentally they are all one,—until the spirit of antagonism has been exorcised and replaced by the spirit of love and reasonable accommodation. And who or what will bring about this spirit unless the Churches called by the name of Christ do so ? Ah ! brethren, when we give imagination the reins and begin to dwell on the vision of what the Churches might be, and the tremendous influence for good they might exert in every department of our complex life, we are refreshed and inspired as on a mountain top. It may be retorted that such nebulous dreams are worse than useless ; but we know that in the

Christian character they have an important place and purpose, for is it not written, "Your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams?" And after all, such thoughts are not so very shadowy. There is solid ground for hope. Amid the welter of the war there has come into relief the Christian spirit of sympathy and solidarity, like a rising sun which lights the sky with amber and gold over a sea that continues to rage and swell. Improvement in attitude and disposition is discernible on all sides, and everyone agrees that, whatever else may or may not be the outcome of this terrible conflict, we simply must not and can not go back to the same old ruts of mutual indifference and hostility.

### The Son of Man.

There is stated in the passage, of which our text is a part, a beautiful and most encouraging truth. "In the midst of the seven candlesticks I saw one like unto the Son of Man." Within and among the Churches is the very Saviour of mankind, and

there can be little doubt that in these latter days men and women in considerable numbers are discovering Him. There is an unmistakable movement in France, and on a smaller scale in England, towards Christian organizations, and the bewildered and the bereaved are finding that the Great Consoler and Healer still dispenses His gifts and graces within the hallowed places.

And above all, surely, is He to be found and drawn upon in His own appointed Service,—the Holy Communion. Pre-eminently is His presence vouchsafed in the Sanctuary through the medium of the consecrated elements, for He said, “This is my Body” . . . . “This is my Blood.” It is as we partake of Him and receive with faith His Spirit into our unworthy selves that we shall each grow in His Likeness and do our humble share in uplifting the Churches from what they are to what they ought to be, and thus elevate their symbol from a candle to a star.

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